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Local & State

Dean chides Focus on the Family

Democrat speaks at Denver fundraiser

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DENVER • Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean on Thursday praised Colorado Democrats for taking control of the state House and Senate last year and indirectly took a jab at Focus on the Family, which recently started a nonprofit group to address public policy concerns.

During a fundraiser, Dean said state Democratic Party leaders turned Colorado into a swing state last year and he promised to work hard for more Democratic victories next year.

"Boy, you sure did have a big lift with that legislative election last year," Dean told a crowd of about 300 people who contributed about $45,000.

The former presidential candidate said Democrats are focusing on families who are willing to sacrifice for their children.

"If you want to focus on the family, focus on minimum wage. If you want to focus on the family, focus on smaller class size," Dean said in an apparent reference to Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family, whose public policy arm has campaigned against gay marriage. Dean said gay marriage is not mentioned in the Bible.

Focus on the Family did not answer calls after hours.

He also criticized two of the state's Republican congressmen for going after illegal immigrants, and he renewed his call for President Bush to fire anyone who leaked the name of CIA operative Valerie Plame to the media.

"Mr. President, keep your word, keep your word," Dean told the crowd.

He indirectly criticized U.S. Reps. Tom Tancredo and Bob Beauprez, both Colorado Republicans, for their stands against illegal immigration.

Tancredo accused Denver of harboring illegal immigrants and revamping its libraries to cater to Spanish-speakers. Beauprez tried to withhold federal aid to Mexico after that country refused to extradite a man suspected of killing a Denver police officer.

Dean said Republicans will try to make immigration a national issue. "In 2006, it's going to be immigrants, you wait and see," he said.

Pollster Floyd Ciruli said Democrats consider Colorado a crucial state in next year's elections after Democrat John Salazar wrested the 3rd Congressional District seat from Republican control. He said Democrats hope to take away the seat occupied by GOP Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, an outspoken opponent of gay marriage, and win the 7th Congressional District seat now held by Beauprez, who is running for governor.

Herb Rubenstein, one of four Democrats running for Beauprez's seat, said it's a swing seat in a swing state that Democrats know they can win.

Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, says the Bible makes no mention of gay marriage.